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DEPT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH, FOOKS, STINCHCOMB)
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2017
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR MARR BK
SUBJECT: BOSNIA- DEFENSE MINISTER ON SECURITY SITUATION

REF: SARAJEVO 2295

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. Minister of Defense Selmo Cikotic requested to meet with
the Ambassador on October 27 to discuss developments in the
security situation in Bosnia. Though clear threats to the
stability of the country were present, Cikotic told the
Ambassador that he believed that he had control over the
security environment. Cikotic urged the Ambassador to not
back away from the confrontation with Republika Srpska (RS)
Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, who had created an artificial
crisis for political purposes. Cikotic said only a "credible
threat of force" would compel Dodik to back down. Cikotic
also suggested that opportunities to isolate Dodik
politically should be explored. End Summary.

Dodik-Generals Meeting Concerns Minister

¶2. (S) Minister of Defense Selmo Cikotic asked to meet with
Ambassador October 27 to discuss the security situation in
the country in light of the deepening political crisis here.
Cikotic said he had concerns prompted by a meeting the day
prior between Dodik, Deputy Minister of Defense Igor Crnadak,
and all four Bosnian-Serb generals in the Armed Forces
(reftel). While the meeting was to ostensibly discuss
defense property and personnel redundancy-- both valid topics
for discussion between the entities and the state-- Cikotic
understood the meeting to have had a different, but not
necessarily nefarious, character. (Note. Cikotic will
continue to develop further information on the meeting. End
Note.) Cikotic told the Ambassador that while he believed
that the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces had control of
the situation, he believed that the worsening political
atmosphere could have security implications. Cikotic agreed
to consider canceling his planned overseas travel for the
upcoming week (to be reviewed in lightof political
developments over the weekend) and emain in Sarajevo in
order to keep watch over thedeveloping situation.

Dodik Provokes ArtificialCrisis

¶3. (S Cikotic said he believed that the entire crisis had been artificially created by RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik. Cikotic said that Dodik was using the "Milosevic strategy" of creating a permanent atmosphere of crisis and convincing Serbs that they were under threat. Cikotic told the Ambassador that it was clear that Dodik was looking for an opportunity to challenge the international community, and the October 19 High Representative decisions provided a pretext to initiate a confrontation. Cikotic stated that Dodik feared subsequent punitive actions from the High Representative, and needed to lay down a marker that the RS would not accept the legitimacy of High Representative decisions. Cikotic told the Ambassador that he was worried that Dodik had left himself little room to maneuver, and that "he did not see a way for his (Dodik's) possible retreat." In the near-term, Cikotic said he did not expect that Dodik would make any moves to challenge defense institutions, but his proxy use of NGOs to stage demonstrations was a security concern. Cikotic also said he had intelligence information that Russia and Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica were providing direct encouragement to Dodik, and engaging in efforts to destabilize the situation.

Military Measures

¶4. (S) Cikotic told the Ambassador that he had met with the EUFOR Commander today and requested that the EU and NATO consider bolstering the EUFOR/KFOR reserve force. Cikotic said he did not see an immediate need to use these forces, but considering the environment in Bosnia and regionally it would be prudent to engage in contingency planning. Cikotic said he expected the atmosphere to continue to be heated in the lead up to the close of Kosovo final status discussions, with Dodik and his allies in Belgrade continuing their attempts to stir up trouble in Bosnia. As for his own actions, Cikotic said he ordered a low-profile monitoring of military installations in order to have advance warning of any suspicious activities. Otherwise, Cikotic said he would not take any further action that would display a change in military "operations, planning and logistics."

Staying Firm

¶5. (S) Cikotic stressed that the international community could not back down in its confrontation with Dodik, and should even consider further actions to reinforce the authority of the High Representative. He told the Ambassador that Dodik only respected "force or the credible threat of force" and could only be checked by substantial pressure "from the outside and inside." Cikotic urged the Ambassador to continue to press Dodik to accept the High Representative's decisions, and praised the Ambassador's forceful press statement of October 26. Cikotic suggested that the international community continue to pressure Dodik behind the scenes, and that the Ambassador should continue to work the RS leadership elite to encourage Dodik to back away from confrontation.

Pushing the Bosnian-Serb Elite to Break

¶6. (S) Cikotic said he thought that the Bosnian-Serb political and economic elite could push Dodik if they felt they "were losing ground" due to his aggressive actions. Cikotic said that Dodik ran a "one man show" and ran the RS government in a highly autocratic manner. Cikotic said he knew that Dodik's close associates "were tiring" of his aggressive style, and were buckling under constant pressure from the PM. Cikotic said that if Dodik were pushed aside, Bosnian-Serb member of the Presidency Nebojsa Radmanovic would be the best option to take control of Bosnian-Serb politics. Cikotic said Radmanovic was "highly competent and capable," and that RS National Assembly Speaker Igor Radojicic could also be expected to partially fill the void and moderate the situation.

Comment

¶7. (S) Comment. Cikotic certainly appreciates the gravity of
the situation here, and it is a good sign that he is reaching
out to us, EUFOR and NATO HQ to coordinate efforts to control
the security environment. He assured the Ambassador that he
would keep us apprised of any threats of destabilization. We
will continue to be in very close contact with him and the
military leadership as long as the political crisis lasts.
While Cikotic claims to be able to monitor the activities of
all military units across Bosnia, we believe that his
resources are limited in this regard. Many of the units,
especially the infantry battalions remain monoethnic and
based in predominantly monoethnic areas. In this context, it
is doubtful that Cikotic would have real-time information if
a security challenge developed with units stationed in the
RS.

¶8. (S) Cikotic also told the Ambassador that he did not plan
to address his activities with the Tri-Presidency, the joint
commander-in-chief, or with Bosniak Member of the
Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic. Instead he would coordinate
his measures with Party for Democratic Action (SDA) President
Sulejman Tihic, who he thought could help influence Dodik.
Cikotic's approach indicates that he views the crisis in
political as opposed to strategic terms. In a real military
crisis, however, such contacts would create a parallel ethnic
and politically based chain of command that would undermine
much of what we are trying to achieve in defense reform.
Given the character of the issues discussed with Cikotic, the
Ambassador chose not challenge him on his approach at this
time. End Comment.
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